

February 21, 2007

Mr. Chair Stoker and members of the House Human Service Committee:

I am writing this in regards to House Bill 612. I encourage you to pass it for the future health of our youth.

Here are some facts to consider in making your decision.

- According to the CDC's Youth Risk Behavioral Survey, many young people begin having sexual intercourse at early ages: 47% of high school students have had sexual intercourse, and 7.4% of them reported first sexual intercourse before age 13.
(<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/factsheets/youth.htm>)
- Sixty-four percent of Montana high school students who have had sexual intercourse reported having had sex with multiple (two or more) partners. Thirty-five percent of Montana high school students who have had sexual intercourse reported not using a condom the last time they had sex. (www.opi.state.mt.us/PDF/YRBS/HSREPORT.pdf)
- "Some adults believe that teaching adolescents about sex and sexuality will encourage them to be sexually active earlier. However, UNAIDS studies have show that this is not the case. In fact, when young people are provided with accurate information on sex and HIV/AIDS, they are more likely to delay sexual activity and use condoms when they finally do have sex. Schools are the hub for such prevention lessons. Education represents the best opportunity not only for delivering crucial information on HIV/AIDS, but also for chipping away at the ignorance and fear that perpetuate stigma and discrimination. An effective strategy for preventing HIV/AIDS among youths is making sure that all children receive formal education in safe and gender-sensitive school environments."
(http://www.unicef.org/aids/index_preventionyoung.html)

Based on the above information and several other sources that would support these facts, I am in strong favor of Bill 612 passing. Other than providing medically accurate information, I support a comprehensive approach that includes abstinence, negotiation skills, resources, and self-esteem curriculum. Giving students all of the information and helping them to make the choice that is best for them is a proactive way to prevent teen pregnancy and the spread of STI's including HIV. Most importantly, it opens the doors for discussion between teens and a trusted adult, hopefully their parents; there needs to be an example of how to talk about sex and that it is ok to do so. If there is anything more I could do to support the passing of this bill, please contact me at: bonjouramies@yahoo.com. I am dedicated to the health of our youth.

Sincerely,

Brooke Bartholomew
Prevention Coordinator
Yellowstone AIDS Project